

SPiRiT OF THE PRESS.

EDITORIAL OPINIONS OF THE LEADING JOURNALS UPON CURRENT TOPICS—COMPILED EVERY DAY FOR THE EVENING TELEGRAPH.

What is the Alternative?

It would be well for those who are dissatisfied with the Congressional plan of reconstruction, and are now placing it in danger by their desertion or denunciations, to let the world know as soon as possible what they would substitute for it. A good many of them—Mr. Ewing, of Ohio, for one, in his recent letter explaining the Republican defeat in that State—talk as if Congress was seeking to establish negro ascendancy at the South, and had instituted negro suffrage there for this purpose of malice aforethought. But it is well known that Congress only came to negro suffrage slowly and reluctantly, and after trying another plan, which actually left the government of the Southern States in the hands of the whites. The prompt and cheerful acceptance of the constitutional amendment, though it did not in our opinion exact as much by any means as it ought to have done, would no doubt have satisfied the North sufficiently to have secured the admission of the Southern senators and representatives to their places.

The amendment was, however, deliberately and ostentatiously rejected; not on the ground that the conditions that it contained were hard or unreasonable—this even the Philadelphia Convention did not venture to maintain—but on the ground that the South ought not to be required to submit to any conditions whatever. After this, Congress had two courses open to it. One was to readmit the South without any stipulation or concession whatever, except the acceptance of emancipation as an accomplished fact, leaving the negroes to be subjected to any régime short of re-enslavement that the whites pleased, and taking no security whatever against a repetition of the revolt against the United States Government. The other was to introduce into the work of reconstruction some new element; since the disloyal portions of the Southern population would not do it, to appeal to the loyal.

Now the first of these courses would, it is notorious, have only pleased a very small minority of the Northern people. Only a very small minority, and that mainly composed of ardent secessionists, would have been satisfied to see the South return to its place in the Union as if nothing had happened. This is no supposition. It is as well ascertained as anything in politics can be. Most people called for conditions of some kind; and all acknowledged that if any conditions were imposed, those contained in the constitutional amendment were not unreasonable, and were in fact as little as could be asked. There then remained the admission of the negroes to the suffrage, at least for the purpose of electing constitutional conventions. Many people were willing to see the color test abolished, but wanted an educational test substituted for it.

To this there were two objections:—First, that an educational test, to be of any real value, and to be free of any indirect discrimination against color, had to be imposed not only on those whom the suffrage had still to be bestowed, but on those already in possession of it. Ignorance is ignorance, whether the voter be a white or a black man. It was, however, admitted that to force the poor Southern whites to learn to read before voting again would be an outrage to which they would not submit. On this no party at the North was prepared to insist; not the Democrats, because they have always opposed the idea that popular intelligence was a political necessity; and not the Republicans, because they, too, in forgetfulness of their earlier creed, were cheated by their anxiety to do the negro justice into proclaiming the suffrage to be the "natural right" of every adult male.

Some went further, and maintained even that anybody was competent to decide any question of government by the aid of "common sense." Moreover—and by this consideration the Republicans were perhaps more influenced than any other—the imposition of an educational test at the present election—that is, at the moment when negroes were most needed by the nation, would have excluded most of them, and have left the vote of reconstruction substantially where it stood. It was said, and with great justice, too, that by admitting all to vote, a pressure would be applied to the whites in favor of popular education which could be applied in no other way; that in no other way could the negroes so well learn their duties as citizens, and in no other way could they so well force the local authorities to do them justice.

It may turn out that Congress, in adopting this latter course made a mistake; but this does not yet appear, and until it does appear those who oppose it are bound to tell us what they would have done had they had their way. Legislation is not a puzzle intended for the exercise of the wits. It is a means of affecting the lives and happiness of whole communities, and those who criticize it have a higher duty than that of finding fault: they are bound to tell their neighbors how to amend. It is all very well to rail against "negro ascendancy," but what ascendancy should be substituted for it? Into whose hands, at the South, will you entrust the task of reorganizing the Government, if not to a majority of the whole people? It is no doubt hard to shut out so many whites because they have taken part in the Rebellion; but if you do not like this, are you prepared to let them shut out those who did not take part in it, but opposed it with all their might? It is no doubt hard to keep so large a portion of the United States soil so long under military rule, but then what kind of rule would be set up if the military were withdrawn? How would the elections, for instance, be conducted? How large a proportion of the Southern population would enjoy any protection for either life or property? Which is most injurious to free government—the rule of an organized military force, acting under laws passed by a deliberative body, or the rule of the knife and revolver, the vigilance committee and the mob?

These are important questions, which every fair-minded man is bound to ask himself, and at last try to answer before he begins railing at Congress. Of the thousands who rail at it, however, probably not one per cent. give them a moment's consideration. What they do is to put themselves through a grand high priori process, in which they take the facts to suit themselves, and make them appear something like this:—"Here is a large, intelligent community of men of our own race, with an admirable system of law, who, though they have been in rebellion, have submitted with a good grace to defeat. They have emancipated their slaves cheerfully at our request. They know the negro well, and having been brought up with him, of course feel kindly disposed towards him, and are anxious for his welfare and elevation. Being weak and ignorant, of course the Sheriff and police and judges devote more care and attention to his interests than they do to those of white men, and as to the

white inhabitants generally, of course they are kind and fair in their dealings with him, as they are deeply interested in his prosperity. Yet Congress, animated by mere spite and malvolence, without the slightest necessity or provocation, has disfranchised a large body of the most intelligent whites, and by giving the suffrage to all the blacks has handed over to them the government of the entire South. We see the result in Virginia."

We have made no attempt to extenuate the result of the late elections in Virginia. We have our own opinion of the gentry who have there undertaken the task of "leading" the blacks, and have expressed it very freely. But that such people should get control of the blacks at the outset, and having got control of them should abuse it, was naturally to be expected. The liability of the freedmen to be misled by demagogues on their first entrance into political life is one of the unfortunate results of their having been so long degraded slaves; and the proper medicine for this weakness is, we take it, participation in the Government. To regard the existence of the weakness as a reason for not attempting to apply the remedy, is about as sensible as refusing to teach a man to swim owing to the certainty that at first he would probably founder a good deal and get his head under water.

Moreover, it must not be forgotten that the large negro majorities are due in the main to the intentional abstention of the whites from voting. A phenomenon of the same kind is by no means unfamiliar at the North—the refusal of the rich and well educated to vote or take any active interest in public affairs, through disgust or despair or love of ease. It has been and is constantly witnessed in this city, and with deplorable results. New York is governed by an ignorant class and one more depraved than the worst of the negroes; but the disgust and neglect of the rich and educated usually call down denunciations on them rather than on the class to which they leave the work of government. Moreover, if we once admit that the negroes ought to be disfranchised wherever the whites choose to abstain from voting, we of course established that if the whites do not vote the negroes are to blame, the whites will stop voting all over the South and leave us to do the rest for them. A more absurd principle it would be impossible to introduce into politics. The true way, in my opinion, to make the whites take their proper part in the government of the South, is to show them that if they choose to sulk they will be ruled by the blacks. If they are once made sure of this, which as yet they are not, we venture to predict they will soon take an active part in elections.

The Coming Man.

The Democrats of this section have little knowledge of their probable candidate for next President, and will thank us for making him better known to them. His name is George H. Pendleton, and he lives at Cincinnati, Ohio. His father, Nathaniel G. Pendleton, was a scion of an eminent Virginia family, who migrated to Cincinnati some fifty years ago, practised law, and made a handsome fortune there, and was chosen to Congress as a Whig in 1840, beating the Hon. Robert T. Lytle, his Democratic competitor, by ten majority, if our memory serves. (Hamilton county was strongly Democratic in those days, but was carried that year for General Harrison on the Presidential vote, which followed the State election aforesaid.)

Nathaniel G. Pendleton was an excellent though not a great man. His son George has inherited more cultivation, and perhaps more natural ability, though far from being a genius. But he is a thorough gentleman in manner and address; and if, outside of his politics, he ever did an unjust or unworthy act, we never heard of it.

We think he will be the Democratic candidate for next President, for these reasons:—The party is now on its high horse, and not likely to stultify itself as it did when it ran a General on a peace platform. It believes it may consult its wishes rather than its fears in choosing its standard-bearer, and is not likely to be undecided before making its national nominations. Now Mr. Pendleton embodies its ideas and its purposes as thoroughly and palpably as Mr. Clay ever did those of the Whig party. A Whig by education, he is a Democrat by conviction and by deliberate choice. In Congress, throughout the war, he never made a speech nor gave a vote that Robert E. Lee or John Slidell could object to. Never desiring disunion, he had early studied Calhoun and become a convert to his view of State Rights and Federal limitations, and he had the authority as giving the Federal authority no power to coerce or constrain a State. Holding the war on the part of the Union aggressive and unjust, he gave it no support, no countenance, whether by word or deed. And, detesting the national debt as representing the means whereby the Confederacy was overthrown, he is now open in his advocacy of its prompt extinction by printing off two thousand millions of fresh greenbacks and giving every holder of that debt the face of his bonds in currency, thus stopping the interest on the debt at once and justifying a reduction of all Federal imposts and taxes by one-half. The country being thus flooded with greenbacks, payable in nothing and never, they could not help falling to ten cents in coin per dollar. Then, if two hundred and fifty millions could somehow be borrowed or otherwise raised, the debt might be got rid of at once, or it would be easy to wait till the discredited rags were out, perished in conflagrations, or were otherwise destroyed. Thus they would ultimately vanish, like the old Continental money, not costing the Treasury a cent. We consider this far more manly than the shame-faced, sneaking rascality of those who prate of paying in "legal tenders" and giving the public creditors as much as they paid for their bonds. We prefer Dick Turpin to Fagin.

Mr. Pendleton is likely to be the candidate, because the South and West are now a decided overmatch for the East, while the Democracy of the West is scarcely distinguishable in type from the conservatism of the South. We think the first choice of a majority of either branch of the party would be Robert E. Lee; but there are prejudices against him as a candidate, which would be less operative, less potent, in the case of Mr. Pendleton. We do not believe there is a conservative in all the North who would object to Mr. Pendleton; if there be one such, he must be very bigoted and exclusive. And no man who did not actually smell powder in the Rebel armies would arouse such enthusiasm in Kentucky, Maryland, and every Southern State organized on their basis as George H. Pendleton. There are many bogus professors of Democratic orthodoxy, but his is the genuine article. His version of the Bible is worthy of the case of Mr. Pendleton. 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